

STATE EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE CALFRESH PARTICIPATION RATE

March 2013

Caseload

- From July 2007 through October 2012 CalFresh enrollment has more than doubled. Currently, the CalFresh caseload is 1.8 million households with benefits of approximately \$7.1 billion issued annually.
- In December 2012, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) released the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2010 report that ranks California among those states with the lowest program participation rates.
- According to the report, in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2010, 55 percent of eligible individuals participated in CalFresh. This is below the national participation rate of 75 percent. However, this reflects an improvement from FFY 2009, when California's participation rate was 53 percent.
- CDSS did a comparison of the data published by California Food Policy Advocates (CFPA) for 2010 and 2011. CDSS projects that California's Program Access Index (PAI) has increased by an average of 19.1 percent from 48.7 percent in 2010 to 67.8 percent in 2011. It is encouraging to see significant improvement given the tremendous amount of effort that the state and counties have put into increasing CalFresh program access and participation in the past few years. Even though the PAI for 2012 has not yet been calculated, we are hopeful it will show that the counties have continued making considerable headway towards increasing program access—given recent caseload growth.

County Efforts to Increase Participation

CDSS, in collaboration with CWDA, requested that counties undertake a three-year goal-setting process to help achieve increased CalFresh participation within their county.

- Counties developed their own plans that focused on in-reach and outreach efforts, increasing program access, addressing churning and retention of cases, and the use of technology. Some promising strategies and ideas identified in the plans include the following:
- Conduct Medi-Cal in-reach by using aid-codes to identify Medi-Cal recipients who are likely eligible for CalFresh and not receiving benefits by initiating a marketing effort to target this group, potentially using outbound calls and mailers.

- Cross-train current Medi-Cal workers to encourage Medi-Cal applicants/recipient to do CalFresh intake on the spot.
- Screening all new Low Income Health Program (LIHP) clients to identify potential CalFresh eligibles.
- Provide information about CalFresh through flyers in food bags at senior food distribution sites and presentations at senior mobile home parks, affordable senior housing complexes, senior center congregate meal sites, and outreach meetings at senior centers.
- Working with local nonprofits to conduct a study regarding CalFresh participation in the county and address barriers by extending community outreach and use geo-mapping to identify “intersection points” of targeted populations.
- Continue to use county and statewide data to target the underserved, which includes seniors, homeless, and non-English speaking eligibles.
- Working with the local Univision station to inform Spanish speaking residents about CalFresh benefits, how to contact the CWD, and how to apply for benefits. Efforts to minimize churning of cases include:
 - Automatic outbound calls to remind clients of their recertification appointment;
 - Determining trends in reasons for discontinuances through focus groups;
 - Contacting clients by phone prior to discontinuing benefits; and
 - Use of telephone interviews for recertification interviews.

Legislation and Policy

- Over the past year, California continued to make significant program changes to increase access to CalFresh for our neediest families.
- Implementation of Assembly Bill 6 (AB 6-Fuentes) is well under way. Highlights include:
- Semi-Annual Reporting (SAR) is mandated to be implemented no later than October 1, 2013. California is the last state in the country to convert to SAR and this transition is expected to increase participation, reduce administrative burden and churning of cases, and improve program access while maintaining program integrity.

- CDSS requested waivers to align SAR with CalWORKs which, unfortunately, were for the most part, denied. We are working on defining the implementation of SAR in light of the denials. For example, CalFresh will have to act for non-assistance cases on household changes. However, for assistance cases, CalFresh won't act unless CalWORKs does on mid-period reports.
- AB 6 also required CDSS, in conjunction with the Department of Community Services and Development, to design, implement, and maintain a "Heat and Eat" utility assistance initiative that would grant CalFresh households a nominal (approximately 10 cents) Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefit. LIHEAP became effective January 1, 2013. The LIHEAP benefit allows applicants to use a standard utility deduction which will increase benefits for many households.
- Elimination of the Statewide Fingerprinting Imaging System (SFIS) requirement as a condition of CalFresh eligibility began on January 1, 2012. A gradual increase in CalFresh participation is anticipated due to the absence of this requirement.
- Application Workgroup - CDSS is leading a workgroup whose task is to simplify the existing CalFresh (DFA 285) application. The workgroup consists of county and advocate representatives who are comparing the current application with applications from other states to develop a simplified application that doesn't require multiple forms and signatures.

CalFresh ReFresh

- Last year, CDSS introduced the CalFresh Modernization Initiative, otherwise known as CalFresh ReFresh. CDSS solicited advocates, counties, and the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) for suggested ideas and improvements to the application and retention process with a goal to greater participation rates.
- The goal was to modernize the CalFresh program by planning for additional program simplifications and removal of access barriers, reducing administrative complexity, providing additional linkages with and coordination among other state assistance programs, providing stronger support for nutritious food choices and nutrition education, and greater encouragement of other program innovations.
- Ten of the 18 initiatives have been fully implemented. Some initiatives are still pending Federal approval of waiver requests. Some initiatives are pending completion of automation and some have been impacted by the CalHEERS effort. An update on some of the initiatives include:

- **Eliminating the Requirement for a Face-to-Face Interview at Application and Recertification** – This ensures that all counties eliminate requirements for face-to-face interviews and standardize the application and recertification process on a statewide basis. This will remove some barriers and streamline the process for applicants and recipients. This was implemented statewide in May 2012.
- **Average Monthly Student Income** CDSS was approved for a waiver of current policy which required a student of higher education work a minimum of 20 hours per week in order to be eligible for CalFresh benefits. The waiver allows us to average work hours (20 per week/80 per month), students who work fluctuating schedules will more likely remain eligible more consistently over time. This policy change was implemented in July 2012.
- **Eliminating the required interview for Elderly/Disabled Recipients** – A waiver was approved on February 7, 2013 which would allow CWDs to waive the recertification interview for non-assistance CalFresh households where all adult members are elderly/disabled and have no income. Policy staff will draft an implementing All County Letter.
- **Automation Changes** –
 - **Case Management** - This provides the ability to clients to have on-line case access to update information and to check benefit status without worker involvement. This is operational in all consortia with varying functionalities:
 - Completing the annual redetermination;
 - Completing address changes;
 - Reporting change in income or household members;
 - Submitting scanned documents;
 - Viewing correspondence;
 - Scheduling appointments; and
 - Auto-populating client identifying information.
 - **E-Notices** – CDSS obtained a waiver from FNS to allow, at client option, the ability to send alerts to clients to let them know to check on line for a new notice as opposed to mailing notices of action. Consortia plan to complete programming in the summer.
 - **Application Assistance Portals** – This would develop an automated method that can be used by community based organizations (CBOs) to better assist clients with the on-line application and checking the status of benefits. In addition, it would provide a method for the tracking of CBO assisted application outcomes. This functionality has been implemented in LEADER and C-IV and is expected to be implemented in CalWIN in August 2013.

- Provide electronic verification of client income and assets – This proposal would utilize a business intelligence system to electronically search other federal and state agencies (Social Security, IEVS, Vital Statistics, etc.) to verify client receipt of income and assets when a CalFresh application is received. As mentioned above, this has been impacted by the Covered California effort and work needs to be done to integrate and leverage that functionality.
- Allow use of telephonic signatures on applications – This would allow telephonic signatures (for client approval of an application or other forms) during a phone interview. This is in use in some counties now and is permissible due to a change in the State Plan.
- Implementing Regional or Consortia-based Call Centers. Call centers are now operational in 22 counties. This may be affected by the implementation of Covered California.

Outreach/Improved Program Access

- Since its inception in FFY 2004, CDSS, along with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), *Network for a Healthy California*, developed an outreach program from a limited pilot project of \$250,000 to a \$26 million dollar statewide outreach effort.
- In FFY 2013, the CalFresh Outreach Plan aims to increase CalFresh participation by approximately 56,000 households. The plan also has the goal to increase retention by assisting 9,400 households with their bi-annual reporting and assist 7,000 households with their annual recertification.
- The plan will provide direct services in 51 counties by 7 primary contractors including the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), Catholic Charities of California (CCC), Clinica Sierra Vista (CVS), California State University, Chico Research Foundation (CRF), 211 San Diego, Santa Ynez Valley People Helping People (SYVPHP) and the Redwood Community Health Coalition (RCHC).
- In FFY 2013-2014, the CalFresh Outreach Plan will have 101 subcontracting agencies. Subcontracting agencies follow a standardized scope of work (SOW) that include the following: application assistance, prescreening, tabling at events, training to partner organizations, distributing CalFresh informational brochures, and materials and program education. Contractors will also work to increase the use of on-line applications and program retention.

CalFresh Contract Agency Activities for 2012

- As part of general CalFresh promotion and community outreach, contractors partnered with 7,547 unfunded CBOs and distributed over 1.5 million outreach materials in English, Spanish, Chinese and Hmong. They also tabled at more than 12,000 events.
- Contractors provided direct CalFresh program support by prescreening 592,895 candidates and provided detailed application assistance to 44,384 households. Contractors worked to retain households and provided follow-up assistance to 40,116 households.
- The application assistance activities resulted in estimated 42,365 additional new CalFresh households.

Additional Outreach Activities

- Strategic state-level partnerships will continue with the California Department of Aging (CDA) to address CalFresh participation within the senior population. One of these efforts is the Golden Advantage Nutrition Program (GANP) Pilot, which focuses on application assistance at congregate meal providers and through the home delivered meals program.
- New partnerships with the California Department of Health Care Services (CDHCS) and the California Employment and Development Department (EDD) are being explored to further support senior outreach and outreach to those individuals that have exhausted their unemployment benefits.
- CAFB's Mexican Consulate Project began as a pilot in FFY 2011 in Los Angeles. It has since expanded into all 10 of the Mexican Consulate sites in California, which account for 20 percent of all of the sites in the United States. CalFresh outreach occurs on-site at the Mexican Consulates, as well as at their mobile Ventanilla de Salud events. CalFresh outreach partners include food banks, CCC, and other CBOs.
- Significant efforts went into the development of a CalFresh Outreach Toolkit. The Toolkit is designed to help organizations and individuals new to CalFresh Outreach understand how outreach is conducted and will standardize both content and approach to training. The Toolkit is currently in the final stages of production and is planned for release to our partners later this year.

- An EBT poster for use at farmers markets and retail locations was consumer tested, developed and is in the process of being distributed throughout the state.

Golden Advantage Nutrition Program (GANP)

- Due to low participation in the program by seniors, outreach to this population remains a priority. New efforts include:
 - CDSS is partnering with CDA on the implementation of the Golden Advantage Nutrition Program (GANP). The goal of this project is to increase CalFresh participation by allowing seniors to utilize their CalFresh benefits to make a token donation at congregate meals sites and home delivered meals.
 - The goal of GANP is not to help fund senior meals programs through donations made by EBT, but rather to encourage seniors to apply for CalFresh benefits and become more comfortable with using an EBT card. CBOs are providing application assistance at congregate meal sites to increase participation among seniors.
 - Currently, seven counties are participating in the GANP pilot project: San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Sonoma, Riverside, Lake and Fresno.
 - Outreach materials specifically designed for seniors have been in production and distributed over the past year. The Outreach Toolkit features a section specifically designed to train outreach workers in how to work with seniors to overcome barriers unique to this age group.